

• *Troubles help us to pray*

• *The background to Psalm 17*

1. Prayer is based upon a claim to righteousness

Troubles help us to pray! In 1 Samuel 23:25-29 Saul is hunting for David. David tries to escape by running into the wilderness of Maon, but still Saul pursues him. At one point Saul and his men were only a short distance behind David, when suddenly Saul received a message which demanded his attention elsewhere ¹. So David escaped. Maybe this was the background to Psalm 17. Certainly it is clear in Psalm 17 that David is again in some terrible crisis with enemies threatening his life ². They are to be found all around him ³ watching his every move ⁴, eager to destroy him utterly ⁵. They act with craftiness ⁶, with cruelty and with no concern for consequences. In this world they are flourishing ⁷, and they are not thinking of anything beyond this world ⁸.

¹ 23:27
² 17:9
³ 17:9
⁴ 17:9
⁵ 17:11
⁶ 17:12
⁷ 17:14
⁸ 17:14

Prayer is based upon a claim to righteousness. What do you do when you are in extremely bad trouble? **You learn to pray in the name of Jesus.** I believe this is really what it means when David is found claiming to be righteous¹. David is very convinced of his own righteousness in this psalm.

¹ compare 4:1; 7:3-5, 8; 9:4; 16:4

¹*Yahweh, hear what is righteous!
 Give heed to my cry!
 Give ear to my prayer from lips that are free of deceit!*
²*From your presence let there come a just decision!
 Let your eyes see what is upright!*
³*You have tried my heart; you have visited me by night;
 you have tested me, but you will find nothing;
 I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.*
⁴*As for the things that people do—
 by the word of your lips
 I have guarded myself against the ways of the violent.*
⁵*My steps have held to your paths;
 my feet have not slipped .*

(i) *David is representing the coming Saviour.*

• *David is praying as the righteous King Jesus*

(ii) *God is likely to answer our prayers when we are seeking to be like Jesus*

• *God honours his people when they maintain sincerity and a peace-making style of life amidst controversy*

• *A life of openness to God and all-round obedience*

(i) David is representing the coming Saviour. God's king is really Jesus. David had amazing glimpses into the future and could speak of a coming Priest-king a thousand years before it happened (as in Psalm 110)! He is acting as if he were the coming King with a perfect righteousness. It is Jesus who can say 'Which one of you can convict me of sin?' ¹. David is praying as a righteous king. Its application in our lives is that we have to pray in the name of Jesus. It is only Jesus who has a perfect righteousness.

¹ John 8:46

(ii) **God is likely to answer our prayers when we are seeking to be like Jesus.** David at times has to confess his sins. He is not claiming that his overall status before God is through his own righteousness ¹. Our 'justification' (to use Paul's term) is without works.

¹ see Psalm 32:5; Romans 4:6-8

Yet it is still true that our sincerity is important. David likes to keep his conscience clear. He is able to say to God, 'Lord, so far as I know I am righteous and sincere in **this** particular controversy between me and my enemy'. The conflicts mentioned in the psalms arise out of David's troubles with Saul and with Absalom. In both cases he knew that he had not **especially** sinned against his enemy, and he expected God to bless him accordingly. God honours his people when they maintain sincerity and a peace-making style of life amidst controversy. David can claim his cause is right. He has avoided deceit and he knows it ¹ (17:1)!

¹ ref

He has allowed God to search his motives ¹. He is resolved to control his tongue ². He is free from carnality and worldliness ³. His life is one of all-round obedience ⁴. Our basic stance before God is to look to Christ's perfect righteousness but if at the same time we know our cause is a right one we shall find ourselves praying with greater boldness ⁵.

¹ 17:3a
² 17:3b
³ 17:4
⁴ 10:5
⁵ remember 1 John 3:21,22

2. Prayer is strengthened when we point to our needs and plead for God's great love to work again for us

Prayer is strengthened when we point to our needs and plead for God's great love to work again for us. Again David prays.

⁶I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words.

But now he points not to his righteousness but to his need of God's love.

⁷Wondrously show your steadfast love, you who by your right hand are the Saviour of those who seek refuge from their adversaries.

⁸Protect me as someone protects the pupil of his eye. Hide me under the shadow of your wings.

⁹Protect me from presence of wicked people who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me.

¹⁰They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly.

¹¹They have now surrounded our steps; they set their eyes to cast us to the ground.

¹²He is like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush.

3. Prayer changes our perspectives

Prayer changes our perspectives. The third part of David's psalm rises to a higher level of urgency. He pleads for justice ¹. He knows he will wake up to find himself in an entirely different situation ². The thought of it is marvellous to him.

¹ 17:13,14

² 17:15

• A higher level of urgency

¹³Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him! Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword.

^{14a}Yahweh, deliver me from such people, by your powerful hand, from these people who belong to this world, whose reward is in this life.

• Deeper passion, given by the Holy Spirit

Sometimes as we pray there comes what I can only call an outburst of holy fire! We plead with a deeper passion, given to us by the Holy Spirit. Such occasions in our praying are wonderful. We should make use of them.

• His enemies can have what they want...

David looks even beyond the grave. His enemies can have what they want.

^{14b}Fill their bellies with treasures! Let them have their fill of children and may they leave plenty for their little ones!

• But David wants something altogether higher and greater - fellowship with God now; and resurrection-glory eventually

But David wants something altogether higher and greater.

¹⁵But as for me, in righteousness I shall behold your face; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness.

What David wants is fellowship with God now; and resurrection-glory eventually. One day all earthly controversies will be finished and we shall sleep and not wake up in this life. When we do 'wake up' beyond the grave it will be to be given our resurrection-glory and we shall be fully like our Saviour-God in holiness and glory.



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